



BRIEFING: July 2011 BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM #8

TO: Chairman Umberg and Committee Members

FROM: Roelof van Ark

DATE: July 14, 2011

RE: Update of the San Francisco – San Jose Section relating to the system approach to be incorporated on the Peninsula (Phased Implementation and/or Blended System).

Background

At the May 2011 Board Meeting, staff requested the Board's approval to investigate the feasibility of a system of "Phased Implementation" on the Peninsula. The phased implementation approach would enable the Authority and its partners, including Caltrain and community stakeholders, to study how to provide initial HST service between San Francisco and San Jose in the most cost effective manner and as soon as possible to coincide with the initiation of HST service to San Jose via the Central Valley. The phased implementation approach would include an Initial Operating Phase (IOP), which would be the first phase in development of the fully built system.

(See April 27, 2011, Memorandum from Dan Leavitt to Authority Board re: Update to San Francisco-San Jose Alternatives Analysis, located on Authority website.)

On April 18, 2011, Congress-member Eshoo, Assembly-member Gordon and Senator Simitian had issued a joint statement, which requested the Authority implement a "Blended System" on the Peninsula, which:

- Explicitly rejected any elevated structures or "viaducts" from San Jose to San Francisco.
- Remained within the existing Caltrain right of way; and,
- Was based on a short-term EIR (Environmental Impact Report) demanded that "the Authority should abandon its preparation of an EIR (Environmental Impact Report) for a phased project of larger dimensions over a 25 year timeframe."

After clarifying discussions with some of the authors, it appears that the legislators believe the blended system would be characterized as follows :

- The alignment in San Mateo and San Jose counties should remain "substantially" within the Caltrain right of way;
- Aerial or viaduct structures are forbidden, unless cities do not oppose such construction, or unless such aerial construction is necessary to ensure functionality of the system and

- There was no intent by the legislators to limit the system to a 2 track system-- if more track is necessary, this is acceptable, as long as the additional the track is necessary to ensure functionality and the alignment remain substantially within the Caltrain right of way.

Senator Simitian/Assemblymember Gordon requested the Authority get back to them at the beginning of August.

Clearly more work is necessary to ensure that the phased and/or blended options for the proposed high-speed train project for San Francisco to San Jose section is well prepared for further discussions. The Authority has taken the following actions to further this effort:

1. Requested a thorough "throughput analysis" of the existing infrastructure on the Peninsula. Caltrain is busy working on this analysis and has given the end of July as the date by which this work could be completed. The outcome of this analysis will identify what capacity exists on the Peninsula with the existing tracks, and what (minimal) additional infrastructure may be necessary to get any benefit out of a "Phased" or "Blended" system (i.e. to ensure that a meaningful amount of high-speed service would be possible along the Peninsula to serve San Francisco).
2. Requested clarification from legal counsel as to a few definitions of Proposition 1A language, mainly relating to "Station Bypass requirements" and the timing requirements for construction under either the phased implementation or blended system scenarios.

Once the Authority has received these inputs it should be possible to determine what infrastructure restrictions exist on the Peninsula, what alternate "Phased" or "Blended" approaches may be sensible, and finally determine any possible CEQA=/NEPA consequences.

In the interim, I have directed the project teams for San Francisco to San Jose (PB and HNTB) to reduce their activities on the Peninsula to a minimum, including ceasing any further work on completing the San Francisco to San Jose Project-level Draft EIR/EIS, so as to reduce the possibility of unnecessary or duplicative work. The project teams will ensure that unfinished documentation is tidied up, but that no new work is started until clarity is reached on the selected way forward for San Francisco to San Jose.

Recommendation

The board is not required to make any new decisions related to this agenda item.

Attachments:

- ✓ Joint Statement by Rep. Eshoo, Sen. Simitian, Member Gordon.

Statement on California High-Speed Rail by:
Congresswoman Anna G. Eshoo
Senator S. Joseph Simitian
Assemblyman Richard S. Gordon

April 18, 2011

Since the passage of Proposition 1A in 2008, each of us has expressed our support for “high-speed rail done right,” by which we mean a genuinely statewide system that makes prudent use of limited public funds and which is responsive to legitimate concerns about the impact of high-speed rail on our cities, towns, neighborhoods and homes.

To date, however, the California High Speed Rail Authority has failed to develop and describe such a system for the Peninsula and South Bay. For that reason, we have taken it upon ourselves today to set forth some basic parameters for what “high-speed rail done right” looks like in our region.

We start with the premise that for the Authority to succeed in its statewide mission it must be sensitive and responsive to local concerns about local impacts. Moreover, it is undeniable that funding will be severely limited at both the state and national levels for the foreseeable future.

Much of the projected cost for the San Jose to San Francisco leg of the project is driven by the fact that the Authority has, to date, proposed what is essentially a second rail system for the Peninsula and South Bay, unnecessarily duplicating existing usable infrastructure. Even if such a duplicative system could be constructed without adverse impact along the CalTrain corridor, and we do not believe it can, the cost of such duplication simply cannot be justified.

If we can barely find the funds to do high speed rail right, we most certainly cannot find the funds to do high speed rail wrong.

Accordingly, we call upon the High-Speed Rail Authority and our local CalTrain Joint Powers Board to develop plans for a blended system that integrates high-speed rail with a 21st Century CalTrain.

To that end:

- We explicitly reject the notion of high-speed rail running from San Jose to San Francisco on an elevated structure or “viaduct”; and we call on the High-Speed Rail Authority to eliminate further consideration of an aerial option;
- We fully expect that high-speed rail running from San Jose to San Francisco can and should remain within the existing CalTrain right of way; and,
- Third and finally, consistent with a project of this more limited scope, the Authority should abandon its preparation of an EIR (Environmental Impact Report) for a phased project of larger dimensions over a 25 year timeframe. Continuing to plan for a project of this scope in the face of limited funding and growing community resistance is a fool’s errand; and is particularly ill-advised when predicated on ridership projections that are less than credible.

Within the existing right-of-way, at or below grade, a single blended system could allow high-speed rail arriving in San Jose to continue north in a seamless fashion as part of a 21st Century CalTrain (using some combination of electrification, positive train control, new rolling stock and/or other appropriate upgrades) while maintaining the currently projected speeds and travel time for high-speed rail.

The net result of such a system would be a substantially upgraded commuter service for Peninsula and South Bay residents capable of accommodating high-speed rail from San Jose to San Francisco.

All of this is possible, but only if the High-Speed Rail Authority takes this opportunity to rethink its direction.

Over the course of the past 18 months the Authority has come under considerable criticism from the California Legislative Analyst's Office, the Bureau of State Audits, the California Office of the Inspector General, the Authority's own Peer Review Group and the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. The Authority would do well to take these critiques to heart, and to make them the basis for a renewed and improved effort.

Frankly, a great many of our constituents are convinced that the High-Speed Rail Authority has already wandered so far afield that it is too late for a successful course correction. We hope the Authority can prove otherwise.

An essential first step is a rethinking of the Authority's plans for the Peninsula and South Bay. A commitment to a project which eschews an aerial viaduct, stays within the existing right-of-way, sets aside any notion of a phased project expansion at a later date, and incorporates the necessary upgrades for CalTrain - which would produce a truly blended system along the CalTrain corridor - is the essential next step.